

THE QUIVER

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"Sat with her face turned away from him"—p. 354.

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BY ALTON CLYDE, AUTHOR OF "UNDER FOOT," "JOHN HESKETH'S CHARGE," ETC. ETC.

CHAPTER LXVII.—A FRIENDLY ACT.

CYRIL CHADBURN had kept his word, telling his story without compunction or pity. He had not forgiven Bessie for rejecting his proffered love, and it was with something akin to gratified revenge that he watched the fair girl's changing colour as she listened to his exaggerated account of the circumstance of Gerald's visit to Chadburn in company with Sylvia Ward. The chances of the day had been

in his favour, and the opportunity thus thrown in his way he had seized and used, so skilfully that it would have been almost impossible to discover from his manner that everything had been premeditated, or to detect any undercurrent of sinister motive in his words, which conveyed just the impression he had intended, neither more nor less. His features were so well under control, and his voice had such a ring of sincerity, that none would have thought of questioning the perfect kindliness of his intentions towards the young lady, whom he seemed to be doing his best to entertain. How mercilessly his calm eyes looked into hers, as he described the beauty, grace, and accomplishments of the doctor's daughter—gossiping pleasantly about her visit to Chadburn Court as if by mere accident—managing to advance certain mysterious allusions, which implied much more than was mentioned, and were noticeable, not so much from what he said, as what he had left unsaid.

How graciously he smiled, as his quiet voice rolled out the smooth, well-turned sentences, which he knew would be like stabs, for his penetration had discovered the secret of her love for Gerald Darley; that love as yet wrapped in the misty veil of silence, and scarcely acknowledged even to herself. It had remained for wise, far-seeing Cyril to discover with his keen analytical brain what her heart had so effectually hidden from others, for even the fond old man, who had been on the watch for any signs of her preference for his nephew, had not succeeded in getting at the truth. But Cyril had intuitively felt that Bessie loved Gerald, and had jealously watched her in the presence of the young doctor. He knew how his light gossip was torturing his listener, even though she seemed to be so indifferent to the frequent association of Mr. Gerald Darley's name with that of Miss Sylvia Ward. He also knew how it made her pulse quicken, just as if he had been counting its throbs with his finger on her wrist, yet he went on with cool persistence, as though he had been experimentalising in the interests of science. It was a species of refined cruelty that was quite in keeping with his pale, passionless face.

"I do not consider myself a very entertaining companion for a lady, Miss Grant," Cyril observed, in his blandest manner; "the fact is, ladies are so difficult to please."

"Not more so than the gentlemen, Mr. Chadburn."

"Pardon me if I differ with you there, for in the company of my own sex I am never at a loss for a subject, but I cannot say the same when I am in female society, but more especially in yours, Miss Grant." (Here he bowed, and threw into his voice a modulated tenderness of tone, which brought to Bessie's face a slight accession of colour.) "I am too didactic for most ladies, though I don't think I can be fairly charged with unduly obtruding my own opinions, for I think my fault is being rather taciturn."

"I never found you taciturn, Mr. Chadburn, or at a loss for a subject. I always thought you a very able talker."

Cyril experienced a strange feeling of pleasure that was quite new to him, as he listened to the young girl's simple outspoken words. How he hated Gerald at that moment, for having come between him and the woman he had chosen for his wife!

"You compliment me, Miss Grant, though I confess it must have been owing to my desire to please you; and how miserably I have failed," he added, with a slight touch of bitterness in his voice.

Bessie looked uneasily at him from under her drooping eyelids.

He continued, "You are the first woman I have loved, Miss Grant, and you will be the last. My heart has gone out to you, and I can never take it back. Pardon me, I know I am transgressing, but my love for you grows every day, in spite of myself and the knowledge that you can never return it; and yet I must confess that I cannot give up all hope; I think I should go mad if I did."

Bessie's look of distress and a slight movement which she made checked Cyril for a moment, as he thought she was going to cut short the interview by leaving the room. He had said just what he wanted; now he could resume their conversation about Gerald Darley. "But I have unconsciously drifted into a forbidden subject, Miss Grant, one that distresses you as well as me."

There was another pause, and as Bessie made no answer, but sat with her face turned away from him, he continued, every trace of the passionate tenderness which had characterised his words dying out, "Let me see, I believe we were talking about your cousin, Mr. Gerald Darley—discussing his professional abilities. Perhaps you are not aware that I am a patient of his?"

He repeated his question when he found Bessie did not reply, for he was determined the conversation should lead up to the subject he had in view—namely, the Chadburn dinner party, at which Gerald and Sylvia were guests.

"Yes, I am, Mr. Chadburn, for Gerald told me."

"Did he say what was the matter with me?"

"No, he never will tell anything about his patients; he says he likes to dismiss them from his mind when he is at Abbey House."

"Ah, that reminds me of something I have to say, for I cannot help taking you into confidence. I confess now that I did not like your cousin when I first saw him, but ever since I have had the pleasure of his acquaintance, or at this date I may add his friendship, I can hardly tell how thoroughly I esteem his character, nor how much I have been impressed in his favour; and that is why I take such interest in his affairs. By-the-bye, did he tell you about his visit to Chadburn?"

"No, I was not aware he had been."

"Yes, he was there to dinner, and enjoyed himself very much. In fact, we had a very pleasant evening."

"I am glad to hear it; does he admire Chadburn Park?"

"Very much."

"If the scenery is anything like what you have painted it, I am sure he would, for he is so fond of the country."

"And so is Miss Ward; she was quite in love with Chadburn."

"Was Miss Ward there?" Bessie inquired, with a visible change in her voice.

"Yes, she came with Mr. Darley." He purposely omitted making any mention of Dr. Ward, and as Bessie remained silent he continued, "She seems to be very fond of his society, and, to judge from what I have seen, I should say the liking was mutual." He could tell by the tremulous movement of her hands how his information had moved her. He went on, cruelly probing the wound, "She is a very beautiful girl, and, I understand, as good as she is beautiful—two things, in my opinion, rarely found together in a woman. You are one of the exceptions, Miss Grant." He paused, as if expecting her to say something, then added, "I confess Mr. Darley's apparent preference for Miss Ward surprised me, knowing as I do that—that his uncle has chosen a wife for him, and that unless he consents to marry the lady in question he will lose every penny of the old man's wealth—a very hard and unjust condition, in my opinion, for no one likes to take a wife they don't love, but when you love another, it must be hard indeed; still, from what I know of Gerald Darley's character, he will sacrifice himself, rather than disobey the old man."

"You talk in riddles, Mr. Chadburn," Bessie said, in a surprised tone.

"Riddles, Miss Grant?"

"Yes."

"Are you not acquainted with the conditions of your uncle's will?"

"I am not."

"Then you are not aware, I presume, that he has fixed upon you as Gerald's wife?"

"Me!"

"Yes, and unless Gerald marries you he will not inherit a penny of his uncle's money; it all goes to you."

"Surely, Mr. Chadburn, you must be mistaken, I cannot believe it is true."

Her voice faltered, and there was a strange look of suffering in her fair face. Cyril saw it, but there was no relenting—no pity in his heart; he had resolved to tell all he knew, with a filling-in and colouring of his own. Where his interests were at stake there was no room for mercy.

"I wish I could think so too, Miss Grant, but, unfortunately, your uncle enclosed a letter intended for his nephew in an envelope addressed to me, and

I read it before I discovered that it was for your cousin; that is how I became so well informed on the subject."

Bessie unconsciously pressed her hand upon her forehead as she asked, with forced calmness, "And you think he—likes—Miss Ward?"

"I do."

"Has he told you so?"

"Not in words, Miss Grant."

"Do you think *she*—likes—him?"

"Yes, if I must judge from what I saw when they were together at Chadburn Court." Cyril never removed his gaze from the pale, sensitive face, with its rapidly-changing colour. He chuckled to himself and murmured, "I have told it admirably, and there is no fear of her encouraging him now; and on his side he is almost certain to refuse to marry a girl whom he thinks is in love with another man; yes, I have managed it admirably." Aloud he said, "I hope you will forgive me any pain I may have caused you, Miss Grant."

"I have nothing to forgive," she answered, in a scarcely audible tone.

"Nothing to forgive!" he repeated to himself, with a gratified smile. If he could have guessed the purpose that was shaping itself in her mind, it would have diminished his exultation.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

OLD DONALD'S STORE.

"Who was it, Jennie?"

The speaker was a tall old man, quaintly dressed after a fashion which had been long out of date. He had bright inquisitive eyes, and large, strongly-marked features, the grey, rugged face being so seamed with wrinkles that it looked as if Time had notched there a register of dates. He had just entered a primitive-looking shop, queer and quaint as himself, whom it claimed as master by virtue of certain mute tokens of resemblance.

There are men who contrive to impress themselves on their dwelling-places, and give character even to their clothes. This might have been said about old Donald Mackenzie, whose stock-in-trade comprised all that could be needed to satisfy the wants both of the inner and outer man. The shop would have looked oddly incongruous to those unaccustomed to the surroundings of a colonial town. A first glance might have conveyed the impression that it was a chemist's, judging by the numerous medicine-bottles, evidently intended for use rather than show. But nearer inspection would have revealed a medley of articles that included everything from a hairpin to a shoe-tie—all could be bought at old Donald's store. As his name indicated, Donald Mackenzie was a Scotchman. He had begun life as a doctor's errand-boy, whence he had picked up his knowledge of medicine, which he turned to account in later years

when he emigrated to Auckland, New Zealand, and made his venture as a mercantile dealer.

"Who was it that called, Jennie?"

Old Donald repeated his question, at the same time glancing towards a young girl who sat behind the counter, knitting, not a fancy mat or kettle-holder, but winter stockings for her father, sensible homely work, such as would have delighted a thrifty English housewife of olden time. As he spoke, the swift play of the gleaming needles stopped for an instant, and she answered, with a demure gravity that was contradicted by something in the expression of her dimpled mouth, "Don't you know, father?"

"Nay, lassie, how should I?"

"Can't you guess?"

He shook his head by way of emphatic denial, and Jennie dropped some of her stitches as she said, "Well, then, I suppose I must tell, but I would rather you found it out, father; stoop down while I whisper."

He did her bidding with a tender docility that came out touchingly in his manner towards her.

Before she could speak, he said suddenly, looking into her happy, flushed face, "Stay, my bairn, maybe I do know after all. He has come back, and that is why I find thee looking so blithe to-day."

The glow on her cheeks deepened, but she laughed softly as she said, "Yes, father, he has come back, as you said he would, and I am so very glad."

"I know that much, my bairn, for I can see it in thy face. Well, I'm right glad myself that the English laddie has turned out no worse than we thought; but where has he been this long time, and why did he leave us to think he had let us drop out of his mind?"

To the girl's sensitive ear something in her father's last words sounded like accusation of the absent. In defence she answered, quickly, "He's been a long way up the country, and he tells me that he has been ill again."

At this point Jennie's stocking seemed in danger of coming to an untimely end, but a dexterous movement caught the falling needles and readjusted them in time to prevent such a calamity. The old man did not remove his gaze from his daughter's face, but let it linger there as if the sight of her made his heart glad, and it did: love for his only child was the poetry of Donald Mackenzie's life. Jennie was the last of a numerous family of fair daughters, who had faded in their early bloom, stricken down by the disease which had laid their mother in an untimely grave. No wonder that he watched her with such anxiety, and did what he could to shield his precious flower, fearful that he might one day see it fading like the rest. Even the beauty of which he was so proud gave him at times a vague uneasiness, as though he feared it might single her out for the prey of that insidious consumption, which so often chooses its victims from earth's fairest children. He had

learned to dread the delicate fitful colour, that some times painted the velvet cheek with an exquisite bloom that seemed stolen from the heart of a blush rose—to dread it as one of the signs that foretold the early fading of the flower.

Jennie Mackenzie attracted many purchasers to her father's store, and, in masculine appreciation, enhanced the value of everything he sold. She dispensed her smiles with such provoking impartiality, and looked so bewitching in her place behind the counter, that there was scarcely an unmarried male who would not have gone far out of his way for the pleasure of spending money at old Donald's store. The eccentric old Scotchman knew that he did not owe their patronage to the superior excellence of his wares. He chuckled over the knowledge as he cast up his ledger and counted the profits that would go to swell Jennie's fortune. There was a curious similarity between two lives that would never cross each other—the thriving emigrant dealer in his home in the far-off colony, and the wealthy master of Abbey House. Each was spending his old age scraping savings for the same end, to build up a happy future for one fair girl, by the means which each held to be all potent—that of money.

The young men of Auckland were not chargeable with bad taste in allowing themselves to be charmed by the beauty of old Donald's daughter, for she was as fresh and sweet and graceful as one of the waving bluebells in her own mountain land. It was beauty such as charmed the soul of the ploughman-poet into song, for Jennie might have sat for a picture of one of his Bonny Jeans or Highland Marys.

Old Donald was moving about his store; he had put on his business air, muttering something about the necessity of unpacking a pile of boxes, that lay on the floor, helping to block the standing-room for customers, which was already much too small. He put a ragged quill pen behind his ear and took his heavy-rimmed spectacles out of their leather case, as though he meant work; putting them on, he turned to Jennie and asked, "Did Mr. Stanhope say when he would come again, Jennie?"

"No, father; but I dinna think he will be long."

The old man gave her a sly look as he said, "I ken what that means, lassie." He went to her as he spoke, and, as if moved by a sudden impulse, put his hand under her chin and raised her face, whispering, "It will be as I said, Jennie."

The girl's face flushed, and she opened her lips to speak, but the shy words would not come. Her father went on, "That laddie hasn't come back for nothing. I kenned how it would be, from the first when he fell ill here, and my lassie had to nurse him; he'll want me to give him my bonny bairn, and——"

A slight noise at the shop door and an exclamation from Jennie, the expression of whose face had so suddenly changed, made old Donald turn round in

time to meet the extended hand of a young man who had just entered, and whom he greeted by name as Harold "Stanhope." It was Harold Chadburn.

CHAPTER LXIX.

BESSIE'S PURPOSE.

CYRIL CHADBURN and Gerald had left Abbey House. The interview between uncle and nephew had been so far prolonged, that the young doctor had barely time to catch the train in which he had arranged to return to Workenbury. Much to Bessie's relief, there was no opportunity for conversation with Gerald; only a few hasty inquiries about her health, and a hurried greeting and farewell. Thus they had parted with a mutual misconception of each other, and an unacknowledged restraint already putting a bar between them. On his part, Gerald's mind was full of the interview with his uncle, and the momentous question which he had left for Bessie to decide. He felt a strangely-depressing chill as he dropped the passive hand, and tried (unsuccessfully) to get a full look into her eyes. What was making her so cold and quiet? Perhaps she had guessed the subject of his conversation with the old man, and had known the object of his hurried summons to the study. Was this alteration of manner the effect of such knowledge? He could not tell, girls were such changeable, incomprehensible creatures. This was Gerald's impression of Bessie during the brief interval in which they were together that morning.

"I don't believe she cares for me; I might almost say I am sure she doesn't. My uncle deceives himself, and interprets things according to his wishes. But to what is all this drifting me? why, back to the old thing—what I have always declared; that I shall be an old bachelor. If Bessie is happy, what need I care; and what right have I to feel angry because she chooses to love some one else? Still, somehow, I can't help feeling as if I had missed, or rather lost something; just the same as I felt when that poor fellow died of typhus fever, in spite of all my efforts to save him. The fact is, I have been getting fond of Bessie almost without knowing it."

From the window of the oak parlour, Bessie watched the departure of the visitors. As the great gates closed upon them, she turned away with a sigh, took up the book she had been reading when interrupted by Cyril Chadburn, carefully marked the page, and put it on the table, then hurried to her own room and rang for Phœbe—her usual resource in any trouble or perplexity.

The faithful creature came promptly, and was concerned to find her young mistress lying on the sofa with her face buried in the pillow, from which her voice came in muffled tones. "Is that you, Phœbe?"

"Yes, Miss Bessie. Oh, dear! what is the matter? are you ill?" and the young girl hung tenderly over her mistress.

"You must not be frightened, Phœbe, it is only my head."

"Shall I run after Mr. Gerald, miss? he will not be very far."

"No, no, no," Bessie exclaimed, with a shiver. "If I could sleep a little it would be better."

"Oh, I do hope it will, miss;" and the girl brought a cloak and covered her mistress with it, adding, as she arranged it to her satisfaction, "shall I bathe your forehead? it always does my head good, miss."

"No, thank you, Phœbe; you can go now; but stay, there is something I want to tell you. Don't call me unless your master wants me very particularly. Say I am not well, and cannot be disturbed."

Sympathetic Phœbe promised, and after expressing her sorrow at finding her mistress so unwell, withdrew, feeling very wrathful towards Mr. Cyril Chadburn, whom she instantly pounced upon as the cause of the mischief, for, having had occasion to enter the oak parlour, she had seen them together.

"I wish he would stay away," Phœbe muttered angrily to herself, as she left Bessie's room, "for I am sure neither Miss Bessie nor master wants him here."

"Well, Darley, and how was it settled?" As he asked the question Cyril Chadburn gave the young doctor a keen scrutinising glance that seemed to say, "Have you failed me?"

"It is not settled."

"Not settled!" repeated Cyril, in amazement, the expression of his face brightening.

"No."

"Why, I understood you to say that you and your uncle had come to an understanding, which, I presume, means that you have said yes or no."

"As far as I am concerned it is settled——"

Cyril interrupted him, saying hastily, "Then you have consented to marry Miss Grant?"

"Conditionally I have, Mr. Chadburn."

Gerald felt the hand that rested on his arm tremble, and was on the point of asking if anything was the matter, when the calm tones of his companion reassured him. Cyril Chadburn had, by a powerful effort, controlled the fierce burst of jealous anger that Gerald's words roused in him, and he said, with apparent friendly interest, "You mystify me. If I am not presuming, may I ask for an explanation of the word *conditionally*?"

"Certainly, though I must own to having misused it. The fact is this: my uncle maintains that Bessie likes me. Now, I know better, from my own observations, as well as from what you have told me. Well, the old man looked so anxious that I couldn't find it in my heart to say 'no'; so I told him I would let Bessie decide, for there is no fear of her saying yes."

Cyril replied, with his usual tact, "Not if she is left to herself, Darley; but at the same time, old fellow, I think you have made a mistake in leaving it

to Miss Grant, knowing as you do the influence your uncle has over her. Take my word for it he will get her to accept you as her husband, no matter how much she may dislike you. Women are so easily talked over by any one they look up to; beside, she is under age, and has really no voice in the matter."

Gerald considered a moment, then said, "Well, if he should succeed in gaining her consent, I can easily decline entering into any engagement."

"You mean to say you would refuse to make her your wife?"

"Yes,"

"Too late."

"Why too late?"

"Because your uncle will tell Miss Grant that you have asked her hand in marriage, and if she accepts it will never do for you to go back from your word. Think over it, Darley, and take my advice; write to-night to your uncle, telling him you refuse to marry her."

At that moment they reached the railway-station, where they were to part, Cyril having an appointment in Chesterdale. Gerald promised to think over his advice as they shook hands through the carriage window. He did think over it, and the result was he did not write. (*To be continued.*)

JANNES AND JAMBRES.—II.



OD dealt with Pharaoh as he deals with us to-day—he did not force him to believe his message. He gave him quite sufficient proof of the truth of that message, and yet the miracles were so constructed as not to bear down irresistibly the opposition his heart offered. We read in words of the Lord Jesus, that in this "time" of the world's history God still pursues the same plan—"Behold, I stand at the door and knock." Why should an omnipotent arm be so gentle; why should he not burst open the door and take a forcible possession? Because he deals with men as with rational beings. He appeals to their intelligence and reason, and does not refuse room for the exercise of free will; and so it comes to pass that while many sit expecting some strange and masterful power to take possession of their affections, and fix them on things above, they expect in vain, for in all things God works by ordinary means—means which he deems sufficient to serve every purpose. And so has he constructed our human nature that in fact only these ordinary means will affect us. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets," the ordinary means used for man's salvation, "neither will they believe though one should rise from the dead." So, reader, in all probability no providence will startle you, no mighty hand will compel you to "come in to the prepared mansion." You will be subjected to no other influences than those which are constantly acting upon you. Learn, therefore, to look upon the events which write your history as living messengers, each one with a voice; and as they stand before you demand of them, "What does the Lord will?" This will give warmth and reality to life, and will make life to you what God intended it should be—one long communication by which the Almighty Father is disciplining a being he has adopted as a son, and making you "meet to be a partaker with the saints in light."

Pharaoh's history is no exception to this rule. The plagues of Egypt were not miraculous in themselves, but in their accompaniments. Every plague was known to the Egyptians; they had experienced each trouble, but never in such proportion. Of each one it was said, "There was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation." The locusts, the mosquitoes, the frogs, the hail, the murrain, and Death himself had previously visited and plagued Egypt; but all their former troubles paled before those which fell upon them because Pharaoh would not let Israel go; and miraculous as were the plagues in their terrible severity, their supernatural character was more remarkable in that they came at a predicted time, and were restricted to a certain area, for God covered as with a shield the land of Goshen, where his people dwelt.

However, in making this assertion, that the plagues were not miraculous in themselves, two points of difficulty arise:—First, how was it possible for Jannes and Jambres to perform the three wonders they did—turning their rods into serpents, water into blood, and bringing frogs out of the river—if these were not miracles which God in his wisdom permitted them to perform? and the second difficulty is, that at least two of the plagues were not after the ordinary course of nature. The Egyptians had never before seen water turned into blood, neither did the memory of their elders nor the annals of their country tell of a "darkness which could be felt" eclipsing the day. The last plague, although, alas! death is no stranger to us, was terribly supernatural, as the cold hand touched with dreadful discrimination only the firstborn.

Concerning the wonders worked by Jannes and Jambres—to admit that they did them by God's power would be to grant them that very thing which St. Paul says they had not—"The power of God." He holds them up as examples of those persons who go with the servants of God a certain

distance by their own human efforts. Jannes and Jambres worked their tricks by means of their magician knowledge. It is useless to try to explain the mode by which they succeeded. The secrets of their order have not come down to us. Neither is it wise to say that it is impossible that any conjuror could perform such apparent wonders: for to-day we may witness as wonderful, and as seemingly impossible things, worked by the Indian jugglers.

Dr. Norman Macleod has published, in "Peeps at the Far East," an account of his witnessing what most Englishmen have seen in India—the celebrated trick of making a plant grow from the barren ground. We take the liberty of transcribing the doctor's own words; and we cannot but think that, after all, the tricks of Jannes and Jambres were not more clever. Indeed, we perhaps might imagine the manner in which they worked their wonders, but we can invent no explanation, nor have we ever heard of one, for the Indian juggler's trick.

"While the tomtom was beating and the pipe playing, the juggler, singing all the time in low accents, smoothed a place in the gravel, three or four yards before us. Having thus prepared a bed for the plant to grow in, he took a basket and placed it over the prepared place, covering it with a thin blanket. The man himself did not wear a thread of clothing, except a strip round his loins. The time seemed now to have come for the detective's eye! So, just as he was becoming more earnest in his song, and while the tomtom beat and the pipe shrilled more loudly, I stepped forward with becoming dignity, and begged him to bring the basket and its cover to me. He cheerfully complied, and I carefully examined the basket, which was made of open wicker-work. I then examined the cloth covering, which was thin, almost transparent, and certainly had nothing concealed in it. I then fixed my eyes on his strip of clothing with such intentness that it was not possible it could have been touched without discovery, and bade him go on, feeling sure that the trick could not succeed. Sitting down, he stretched his naked arms under the basket, singing and smiling as he did so; then lifted the basket off the ground, and behold a green plant, about a foot high! Satisfied with our applause, he went on with his incantations. After having sat a little, to give his plant time to grow, he again lifted the basket, and the plant was now two feet high. He asked us to wait a little longer, that we might taste the fruit! But on being assured by those who had seen the trick performed before that this result would be obtained, I confessed myself 'done,' without the slightest notion of the how. I examined the ground, and found it was smooth and unturned. Apparently delighted with my surprise,

the juggler stood up laughing, when one of his companions chucked a pebble to him, which he put into his mouth. Immediately the same companion, walking backwards, drew forth a cord of silk, twenty yards or so in length; after which the juggler, with his hands behind his back, threw forth from his mouth two decanter stoppers, two shells, a spinning-top, a stone, and several other things, followed by a long jet of fire!"

We may dismiss, then, our first difficulty, and consider that, if it was possible for the Indian juggler to perform the above trick, it might be within the power of Egyptian magic to work the three wonders Jannes and Jambres performed.

In saying the plagues were not miraculous in themselves, a second difficulty meets us. How are we to account for the turning of water into blood, and the thick darkness, unless by admitting that these two plagues were miraculous? Surely neither the one nor the other had been known in Egypt before; surely both were contrary to nature—supernatural. But if this had been the case Pharaoh would have had no room for doubting the Divine commission of Moses, and must have submitted to the acknowledged power of God. Moreover, these plagues would have been exceptions to the general rule, for without dispute the rest of the plagues were only extraordinary in their terrible proportions, and in their coming and going as Moses predicted. So we turn to natural history, and ask if it is possible to find a probable explanation? Have we any reason to believe that the reddened water was not actually blood, but only looked like blood? And have the waters of the Nile ever been known to assume a tint which if deepened would make them like blood?

In the account of the first plague we are told that the Egyptians digged in the sand, on the margin of the river, to find water. It is true it does not say they found drinkable water; but from the mention of the fact there can be no doubt the sacred historian intended to convey that they did find water fit to drink. Then, if so, the liquid in the river could not have been blood; for the mere filtering of the fluid through some feet of sand could not have the effect of turning the blood back again to water, and if the filtering did purify the water, the redness must have been due to some matter suspended in the water. What this red matter probably was we may more than conjecture.

The Red Sea acquires its name from the fact that occasionally its waters assume a red colour. M. Ehrenberg, the celebrated naturalist, says: "I saw from Tor, near Mount Sinai, the whole bay, of which the village is the port, as red as blood; the open sea beyond the coral reef which fringes the shore kept its ordinary colour. The wavelets carried to the shore during the heat of the day a purple mucilaginous matter, and left it upon the

sand, so that in about half an hour the whole bay was surrounded by a red fringe."

Upon examining the water with a microscope, M. Ehrenberg found the coloration to be due to a minute seaweed, of which there were 25,000,000 in a square inch. And since the water was dyed to some depth, it is utterly impossible to conceive the exuberance of this vegetable growth. Now the Nile and the Red Sea are so near to each other that it is far from being improbable that the same phenomenon as is occasionally witnessed in the one may also occur in the other. And at the command of God so sudden and so exuberant was the growth of this minute weed, that the waters became not only undrinkable, but literally choked with vegetable matter, so that they were stagnated, and the fish died.

By digging, however, several yards from the bank of the river, the water as it percolated through the sand would be strained of its vegetable matter, and again become drinkable. This fact, no doubt, was used by the magicians to confirm their theory that Moses was only a magician like themselves, and could not change the nature of things, but only alter the appearance for a time—a power they also showed they possessed, as they reddened water, until it appeared to be blood. Pharaoh gladly accepted the explanation, steeled his heart to the voice of his conscience and his reason, and would not believe.

The other plague which seems contrary to all experience was "the three days' darkness"—a darkness which caused the Egyptians to keep within their rooms, and not "stir from their places;" a darkness which could be felt.

It is evident from this description that it could not have been a mere absence of light, an eclipse of the day which caused the darkness, for this would not have prevented the people from leaving their houses. But that which threw the deep and nightly gloom over the devoted country must have been something which so thickened the air as to exclude the rays of the sun, and at the same time something which made the air unfit to breathe.

Every Eastern traveller dreads a sand-storm. The hot wind becomes filled with the finest particles of sand, which not only penetrate into the most secluded places—the inner chambers, the

very drawers and cabinets—but pass with the inhaled air into the lungs, and produce an irritation in all the air-passages terrible to bear. The tongue swells, the mouth is parched and burning, the eyes become bloodshot and irritated, and the whole frame is in agony.

As soon as the storm approaches, the inhabitants run into their houses, the doors and windows are closed, and every means is used to cover every open chink by which the burning air might find an entrance; yet with every care the fine sand penetrates everywhere, and in spite of every safeguard the inhabitants are subjected, not only to great inconvenience, but to actual pain.

Here, then, we have a reasonable explanation of that three days' darkness. He who keepeth the winds in His treasure house, brought in the south-west wind. The hot simoom urged before it clouds of the hot sand of the Sahara. No sand-storm was ever known like that. The day became gloomed, then the murky light deepened—to total darkness. Not an Egyptian dare open a door or a window; every chink was stuffed, that the terrible desert-breath might not enter. The fifth angel had poured out his vial, the kingdom was full of darkness, and they gnawed their tongues for pain.

But Pharaoh and his servants, so accustomed to extraordinary visitations, easily persuaded themselves that this ninth plague was in no way miraculous, but only a very terrible simoom, whose coming the sagacity of Moses had predicted. So they blindly persisted in their first inclination, not to believe. They had gladly accepted the plausible explanations of Jannes and Jambres, and pursued the path long after the magicians themselves had retreated—a path which led them into deeper blindness, until "having eyes they could not see, and ears they could not hear;" they could not see the warning hand which beckoned them from their doom, nor hear the oft-repeated cry of patient Mercy, ere their eyes were closed in death, and their ears unconscious of the rushing and the surging of the Red Sea waves; and all this—the ruin of the country, the death of the nation—came upon Egypt because her magicians appeared to have what they did not possess—the power of God. It is a terrible thing to have the form of godliness, but not the reality; the appearance of godliness, without God.



(Drawn by JOHN LAWSON.)

"He crawled up to the open door and looked in."—p. 364.

"A GRAND MISTAKE."

BEN BURTON was an English mechanic, strong, healthy, industrious, but, unfortunately, he did not prosper quite so well as he thought he had a right to expect. What was the reason? Ben's own pet phrase furnishes an answer. "Ah! that was a grand mistake I made," he was frequently in the habit of saying, not only with regard to his choice of a trade, but to every other important event of his life. In fact, Ben was always making grand mistakes.

Now Ben had been for some time engaged to as true-hearted and nice a girl as ever lived, and very fond he was of her. They had been engaged for three years, certainly a very long time, but then she was only sixteen when he had won from her the promise that she would some day be his dear little wife, and it was simply ridiculous to think of marrying then for some years to come. There had been plenty of lovers' quarrels between this engaged pair, for Ben was a hot-tempered, jealous fellow, and was very apt to think that his Jenny showed too much favour to certain other young fellows; but somehow or another they had all been made up, and things had resumed their former smoothness. Ben, however, took it into his head to think himself very unhappy, and somewhat badly treated.

"No good comes of long courtships," he said to himself, again and again; "I was a fool to go courting such a child as Jenny, and keep dangle about in this way, instead of waiting till I was able to marry her, and then, when she'd given her consent, walking straight to the church and having the banns put up in a manly sort of way. Ah! that was a grand mistake of mine. I wonder what people think of it; either that I can't make up my mind to marry her, or that she can't make up hers to marry me, I'll be bound."

It was not very long before Ben heard something of what people thought about his love-affair.

"I say, Ben, old fellow," said one of his mates to him, as they walked home together from their work, "when are you thinking of getting married? Folks say they think you and Jenny must be getting tired of each other. I have heard say that she's rather sweet upon that soldier cousin of hers, young Jim Stevens. She hasn't jilted you, Ben, has she?"

"Jilted me, indeed!" laughed Ben, with an attempt to look unconcerned, which he certainly was not.

Once at home, he sat and brooded over his friend's words. "So people think that Jenny has jilted me; jilted *me*, indeed! that there's many a girl would be only too glad to keep company with."

You see Ben had a fair share of conceit.

"Well, it's my own fault, and the only way to stop people's tongues is to get married as soon as I can. What's the good of waiting about? I mayn't get more wages for years to come, and Jenny will be a capital manager, I know. The next time I see her I'll ask her to name the day: I declare I will, and see if that won't put a stop to people's gossip." And having come to this happy conclusion, Ben went to bed and slept comfortably, unconscious of the fact that the idea of his putting a stop to people's gossiping, was as grand a mistake as ever he made in his life.

So on the very next Sunday, Ben gained from his blushing sweetheart a promise that the wedding should take place in three months from that day, Jenny stipulating for this period as being absolutely necessary for her preparations; her hot-headed lover would have preferred to have limited the time to three weeks, there being nothing to wait for, as far as he was concerned, for he had made up his mind to live on with his mother after his marriage, his means being too limited to do otherwise, unless he consented to take two miserable rooms and furnish them how he could. This plan, however, was not to be entertained for a moment, for, as he said to Jenny, "whatever would people say?"

Thus affairs had been so far arranged, and Ben was beginning to think himself the happiest man possible, when once more his equanimity was disturbed by the words of a friend. "So, Ben, you're going to get married, I hear. Wish you joy, old fellow; but, I say, it isn't true, is it, that you're going to live with your mother? I don't fancy that'll answer at all. As Bill Matthews said to me this morning, 'Mark my words,' he says, 'that arrangement won't last long. Poor Ben'll be worried out of his life between the old one and the young one.' Besides, it's so shabby-looking for a fellow like you."

This was a dreadful cut to Ben. If his friends made such remarks, what must others say? From his having lived with his mother, he had been enabled to make his wages go a long way, and evidently people thought he was better off than he really was. However, he wasn't going to come down in their eyes, he settled with himself; and so, after a good deal of consideration, he hit upon a plan by which he could start his married career in the style that was expected of him.

A friend of his who had got on in the world had lately started in a small way in the furniture line. With him Ben arranged that he should have sufficient furniture for the three rooms of a little cottage, which he had decided upon taking, the

said furniture to be paid for by weekly instalments. Accordingly Ben, determined to be very economical indeed, set himself to the work of selecting, and, despite his economy, found in a very short time that he had a debt of twenty pounds on his hands, he being in the weekly receipt of one.

Of course Jenny could not help being delighted at the idea of having such a snug little home all to herself, although she had readily enough fallen into the plan first mooted, and had resolved to be a good affectionate daughter to Ben's fast-aging mother. She was but young yet, and a little thoughtless—the result perhaps of having been always in service, in the midst of plenty—or she would have had more accurate ideas of the exact length a pound would go.

The wedding-day was a great success. As Jenny's parents lived miles away, Ben's mother provided the marriage-feast, which was something marvellous in its way. There was roast pork, and boiled beef, and a glorious plum-pudding all aflame, served up to the admiring guests, for Ben's mother had been a hardworking woman, and had managed to scrape together a pound or two, which she was glad enough to spend on her son's wedding, believing, as she did most firmly, that he would never let her come to want it. She certainly had felt somewhat aggrieved at the altered plans, for she had looked forward to having him always with her. "But after all," she said to herself, "Ben ought to know best."

Was it that Jenny was not quite used to house-keeping? Somehow or another, at the end of the first week, there was absolutely nothing left to pay off the furniture account. Ben's friend put on a stern face, and said, in a meaning way, "This must not occur again."

This first week had necessarily been one of great expense, the next one would be lighter. So thought Ben, as he walked homewards to the cheerful tea Jenny had prepared for him.

Try as he would, Ben could not pull up over the ground he had lost. If he managed to pay the weekly instalment, his rent had to be left. If he paid the rent, the other was left owing. These two *must* be paid somehow; so Jenny was told to ask credit of the baker and butcher. Jenny demurred, and Ben grew angry. "It's only for this once," he remarked; "can't you trust me to manage my own affairs?" And as Ben marched off to his work the idea came into his head that he had been a fool to marry on a pound a week; in fact, that he had made "a grand mistake."

Poor Jenny sat down, and had a fit of crying as soon as her husband had left the house. "I can't think what Ben does with the money," she sobbed; "it's very little he brings home to me. I try so hard to make it last, and yet he's always reproaching me. Oh, dear! oh, dear! how unkind it is of him."

And so Jenny, afraid to ask him for more when the really insufficient supply ran short, was compelled to act against her judgment, and run up bills with the tradespeople.

At the end of six months Ben found himself in as disagreeable a plight as he well could be. Afraid of what people would say, he could not summon the courage to give up his cottage and go back to his mother's house, nor would his pride allow him to tell her, or even his wife, of his difficulties. A pound a week was utterly insufficient for all the purposes it had to meet, consequently the rent was left, week after week, till at last the landlord became threatening. Ben's friend, too, had been saying very unpleasant things for some time past, and matters had at length reached such a crisis that a break-up was inevitable.

"I must ask mother to help me now," he determined one evening, as he sat drinking by the bright fire of "The Three Crows," a habit he had lately acquired; "it's no good, I can't go on like this any longer, I'll go— Hey! what's that?" he exclaimed sharply to a man who had just entered, and was asking him if he'd seen the guest his wife had got at home to supper. He knew too well the meaning of the man's jest; the blow he had been expecting for the last few days had come, and his disgrace was known to everybody. What was the good of going to his mother now? how could he ever face her or Jenny? Then again, if his mother helped him out of this difficulty, there were plenty of other debts behind it, for everybody would be down upon him now, and it was impossible to pay them. He buried his head in his hands and groaned aloud.

"Don't take on like that, man," laughed his companion; "you'll see worse than this, I reckon, afore you're many years older. Keep your spirits up by pouring spirits down, is my motto," he added, as he called for two good stiff glasses of whisky-and-water, one of which he persuaded Ben to drink. "Why, you're better already; we'll have another," he exclaimed jovially, at the conclusion of the first glass, and Ben, who in his wretchedness was scarcely conscious of what he was doing, drank it down, and others beside, till his hand grew unsteady and his eyes dim, and to walk straight became an impossibility. It was the first time in his life, and he was keenly alive to the degradation. To face Jenny in such a condition never entered his head, so he wandered on, utterly unconscious of any purpose, except that of keeping out of the way of his own home, till he found himself miles away, in a place whose strangeness was to him the greatest possible relief.

As he walked listlessly along, a word in gold letters on a window-blind attracted his attention—"Emigration." The very thing for him! What good was he in England? If he went back to his

home, Jenny would heap reproaches upon him, and all his neighbours would point at him. The further away from England the better. His mind was made up: he would emigrate.

Upon inquiry, he found that he could start in three days' time, as a common seaman, the captain of an emigrant ship about to sail in that time consenting, after much parley, to take him aboard in that capacity. Accordingly, a week later saw him fairly out at sea, worked to death, and horribly ill, amidst the noise and racket always to be found on board an outward-bound emigrant vessel.

In spite of it all he was hopeful, even when he stepped ashore, with scarcely a farthing in his possession, his hands blistered with the unusual work, and his general health miserably shattered from the privations he had undergone during the voyage.

Weeks and even months passed away before that wonderful hopefulness could be quite crushed out. Long miserable days of illness and well-nigh starvation, varied by an occasional labourer's job and crust of bread, till at last, when he was fain to sink down by the roadside, and die in the utter faintness of body and soul, there came over him an intense and almost heartbreaking longing to look once more into the loving eyes and pillow his weary head on the dear bosom of the wife he had so cruelly left alone to brave out the storm his own hand had raised about her.

"I have made mistakes all my life long," he groaned, "but when I was coward enough to leave the poor little woman and come to this horrible country, I made the grandest mistake of all."

From this time Ben made up his mind to return to England—a resolve more difficult to put in practice than to make. Each succeeding day saw him at the landing-place, wistfully watching the departure of vessels in which he could not get a berth. For him, the wretched beggar, every one had a sharp word or a suspicious look. Nobody would believe that he was honest, and willing to work; and as he glanced at his soiled and tattered clothing, his half-naked feet, and thought of his general appearance, he began to doubt whether his own Jenny would not start back from him in horror and repulsion. But at such times a sweet, tender vision was conjured up before his eyes, luring him back to his purpose. Would not she take him back to her heart for its sake?

At length, however, the day came on which he left behind him the shores of the land that had received and treated him so cruelly. And although

his experience of sea-life on this his second voyage was no more agreeable than the former had been, the thought of being "homeward bound" enabled him to bear cheerfully all that he had to undergo.

A more miserable object than he, when he once more landed on English soil, could not well be imagined. His hands and face tanned to the colour of mahogany, his hair long and matted, and his clothing in rags, it was little wonder that he met everywhere with looks of distrust, as he slunk down the least-frequented ways he could find.

Creeping by night into his native town, he came at length to what had formerly been his own home. The pretty little cottage was tenantless, and its garden overgrown with weeds. Although this was only what he must have expected, it seemed to strike a chill to his heart, so that he could scarcely find courage to go on to his mother's. What if that should be the same?

He paused once more at a second gate. A glance showed him that his fears were groundless. In the cottage window the blind was drawn up, and a little lamp burning brightly, placed by a loving hand as a beacon to himself. He crawled up to the open door and looked in; there, seated by the fire, her face more wrinkled and thinner than of yore, was his mother, and with her back to the window a younger figure, that he recognised at once. The two seemed to be talking earnestly together, and as Jenny turned half round, he could see the tears in her eyes, and something in her hand—a photograph he had given her in the old courting-days.

But the turning round had revealed something else to his eager eyes. On her lap an odd bundle of white, warm and soft, jealously guarding something that he tried in vain to catch a glimpse of. But for that he would hardly have dared to go in, though he little knew the injustice he was doing his Jenny by his distrust of her welcome, till he was fairly in the room, and sobbing like a child in her loving embrace.

And then when he had penetrated into the depths of that mysterious bundle, and had been even allowed to hold it in his own rough arms; when he thought of what a wretch he had been to leave his poor little wife to struggle alone, as far as he knew, with the world under such circumstances, and again, when he thought of the dread he had entertained of the reception she would give him, he could not help acknowledging to himself that these were the grandest mistakes he had made in his life.

L. M. C.

SONGS AT EVENING-TIME.—II.

BY S. J. STONE, B.A., AUTHOR OF "LYRA FIDELIUM."

THE MEDITATION OF ISAAC.—Gen. xxiv. 62–67.

THE first sad hour that darkens life,
 The first sense of decay,
 The heart's first weariness or strife,
 This doom may long delay,
 But comes at length—th' inevitable sign,
 Of what in us alone is deathless and Divine.

Or soon or slow, th' apocalypse
 Of needs than earth more wide;
 Or soon or slow, in some eclipse
 Of pleasure, passion, pride:
 Or soon or slow, it cometh sad and sure
 To say, "Nought can below suffice thee, nought
 endure."

Our life's experience hath its birth
 In travail very sore;
 We groan to find the fruits of earth
 All stricken at the core.
 'Tis hard to waken from that childly dream
 That made life's lovely flowers all amaranthine seem.

Yet it is well that out of youth,
 Though in amaze and fear,
 We thus should waken to the truth—
 That secret sad; and hear
 The voice that cries, "O blind of soul and fond,
 Thou dost but sojourn here, thy true life is beyond!"

"Lo, thou art of eternity!
 What canst thou find in time
 Wide as thy soul's immensity,
 Or as its hope, sublime?
 Grope not amid these wrecks, but on them rise;
 Know thyself what thou art, an heir of yonder skies!"

Yes, it is well; for joy abides
 More steadfast if more grave;
 The sparkling rivulet subsides
 Within the deeper wave.
 In ways of prayer and larger thought we find
 What bliss in strength of trust o'erflows a quiet
 mind!

So doth a second life begin
 For him who doth not quail;
 New streams of comfort flow within,
 Though the old fountains fail:
 And in the seeming waste new flowers upspring,
 New trees their calm cool shade beside the waters fling.

Fell upon Isaac's heart of old
 The sickening sense of pain
 That saw earth darken and grow cold,
 And knew that not again
 Could time give back the summer sunny-warm,
 Its thousand sparkling joys, its one beloved form.

His heritage,* the solemn field
 By Hebron's altar stone,
 A treasure in its breast concealed
 Which had been all his own—
 Death's now, for ever; in that lonely cave
 Seemed it with that dear form his heart too had its
 grave.

O mother's hand and voice and eye!
 Cold, silent, dimmed away!
 With them the glory seemed to die
 Out of the golden day.
 Dread looked the world, so beautiful before,
 Wrapt in the mists of death and sorrow evermore.

Then was it well that other light,
 Which is not of this sun,
 Brought other knowledge into sight,
 And that new life begun;
 And in his father's Hope he learned to stand,
 With eyes that looked in peace far o'er this border-
 land.

Then all was well: less lovely now
 Than in the gleam of youth,
 Life set a crown upon his brow
 More noble with the truth,
 The strength of trust in one exalted aim,
 A crown more sure than joy, more excellent than
 fame.

Yet but a space did God withhold
 That proven heart from joy,
 And, where sad Hagar saw of old
 His grace by Lahai-roi,†
 The Well of Life and Vision, sent ere long
 On that lone, silent tent new love in light and song.

So fell it in an evening hour:—
 Slowly he passed aside,
 And sought in peace the gracious power
 That falls with eventide:
 Blest is the hour—than all the day more blest—
 Breathing on weary hearts the benison of rest.

Rich lay the sunlight far and near;
 Through the great palms it shone;
 Whispered the breeze upon his ear
 Its tender monotone,
 As, the fair fields the Lord had blest among,
 Rose through the calm, sweet air the lone man's
 evensong.

* The field of Machpelah, before Mamre or Hebron, was the first, and at that time the only, possession of Abraham in Canaan.

† Beer-lahai-roi (the Well of Life and Vision) was the scene of the revelation made to Hagar (Gen. xvi. 14), and it was beside it that Isaac afterwards dwelt with Rebekah.

Then lo! the answer of the Lord,
 What vision meets him there?
 He knows it for the sweet reward
 Of sorrow, trust, and prayer;
 O maid, as thou didst leave,* forget thine own!
 Lo! 'tis thy lord—be his, for ever and alone!

O glowing eve! O light of love,
 Deep, tender, and serene!
 O Lahai-roi! O life above!
 O light of the unseen!
 Lord! from the alien lands so call Thy bride—
 So lead her, bring her home at blessed* eventide.

CHRISTIE AT HOME.

A STORY FOR LITTLE CHILDREN.

CHAPTER II.

SO now it was Christie who, when the time came for her papa to go to the bank, got ready his hat and gloves, and shut the door after him, just as she had seen her mamma do. Then it was Christie who sent the two eldest boys off to school with their books all right, and who kept the three youngest children quiet nearly all the morning, so that Sarah might do the work in the kitchen, and Ellen be able to wait upon Mrs. Bridgman. And it was little Christie too who sat with her mamma in the afternoon while she was sleeping, ready to call Ellen when she woke, and who kept quiet and patient, although the sight of her white face made her feel very sad.

And so passed her birthday away—rather slowly and sadly, and very differently to what she had hoped. True they had the plum-pudding and cake, but the great trouble which had overshadowed the house had even taken the sweetness from the plums and currants, and Christie, at any rate, felt all at once too much of a woman to care for them.

Once during the day she had to go to her mamma's workbasket for something or other she wanted, and there she found a brown-paper parcel directed to herself. Christie's heart throbbed a little as she laid it back; for she would not take it until it was given to her: and so it remained there until the evening, when her papa gave it to her with a loving message from Mrs. Bridgman; then Christie found it was a book of sweet hymns for children.

A week went by and every one got used to Mrs. Bridgman's being ill, and all the children brought their troubles to Christie instead of to her, for Christie only was allowed to go in and out of her mother's room. Then a fortnight slipped away, and still she was not able to sit up long at a time; her arm was going on nicely, but she seemed to grow weaker instead of stronger, until at last Ellen left off speaking cheerily of the time coming when her mistress would be quite well again, and Mr. Bridgman went about always with a troubled look upon his face.

One Sunday evening Christie, sitting alone with her papa, busily learning one of her new hymns,

looked up from her book to see him looking so very sad that she knew at once something must be the matter.

To lay down her book, to climb upon his knee, and to ask whether mamma was worse took about a minute. Mr. Bridgman put his arm round her and then waited a minute or two before he answered. Christie, looking up, saw something very much like tears in his eyes, and it frightened her, for she had never seen him cry before.

"Christie," he said at last, rather huskily, "the doctor has told me to-day that your mamma will never be well again, unless she has all the good wine and strengthening jellies she can eat; and—and, Christie, those things cost much money, and I have no money to buy them with."

Christie's heart grew very sorry, and she put up her hand to her father's face as if she would comfort him, while a wild wish darted to her brain that she could earn some money to give him. She knew a little of what it is to be poor, and she knew how hard her mamma had often worked to save a few shillings, but poverty had not brought with it such a trouble as this before.

So now they sat silent and sad together, father and daughter, until at last the verse Christie had learnt but a few mornings since came to her remembrance, "Thou openest thy hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." She whispered it softly to her father. Mr. Bridgman held her closer still in his arms; he, too, could remember Christie asking him to tell her exactly what it meant, and how he had done so; and now he said, "Christie, God's hand holds enough to satisfy every one; we will ask him to send us those things we so greatly need; he has only to open his hand."

Christie nodded her head, and after they had done so, she went off to bed, trusting with a child's simple faith, that it would all come right at last.

The next morning she woke early—too early to get up, and so she lay still thinking; and at last came the thought that it was a long time since she had written to Miss Alston, and that she would do so that very day.

So, when in the afternoon she had a little quiet time to her herself, she got her pen and paper, and

* Cf. Ps. xlv. 10.

* Zech. xiv. 7.

after spoiling one or two sheets for want of her mother's help, she managed to complete a letter she thought would do; and as you may like to know what she said to her friend, I will write it here:—

"MY DEAR MISS ALSTON,—I thought this morning in bed that I should like to write to you; but mamma cannot help me, so please excuse mistakes. Mamma is very ill; she fell downstairs and broke her arm. It was the night before my birthday she fell; and if she had not, she meant to take us to the Zoological Gardens. Papa is very sad, and so are we all. I hope you and the white cat are quite well. Fluffy is,

"I am, dear Miss Alston,
"Your loving friend,
"CHRISTIE."

When Christie had finished writing her letter she directed it with great care, asked Ellen to give her a stamp, because her papa was out, and she did not like to trouble her mamma, and then gave it to Sarah to post.

I think it was two days after this that Christie and the children, coming home from their daily walk, found in the little hall a hamper so large that it seemed to take up nearly all the room, and beside it a box, which Christie instantly recognised as Miss Alston's.

Of course Miss Alston herself was up-stairs with Mrs. Bridgman; she had come to London on purpose to nurse her old friend, she said; and, although it was very little Miss Alston said about that, yet the large hamper was found to contain more bottles of good wine, besides many other good things, than Mr. Bridgman ever even gussed at.

How glad Christie was to see her again I don't think I can tell you, and when night came, and the old lady even found her way up into Christie's attic room, in order that she might tuck up her little favourite, the child felt perfectly contented.

"Why did you not write to me before, Christie?" she said, when she had made all comfortable. "To guess from your pale sober face, it does not suit you vastly to have all work and no play, like, I fancy, has been the case with you the last fortnight. You shall have some play soon to make up for it, if I can manage it, Christie, for I don't think it will be long before your mamma is better now."

Nor was it; whether it was the good wine and nourishing food—which there was no lack of now—or whether it was Miss Alston's excellent nursing, I can't exactly say, but certain it is every day, as it came and went, found and left Mrs. Bridgman stronger and stronger.

Nor did Miss Alston break her promise that Christie should have some play; for when she could leave Mrs. Bridgman, she took her and the other children to the Zoological Gardens, and to many other nice places as well; until at last they thought

she was certainly kinder and better than any one else they knew.

Then when the time came for the old lady to go home again, she insisted upon Mrs. Bridgman going with her, that the country air might make her strong again, like it had done Christie in the winter; and, as you may think, little Christie could not help wishing she was going too.

But of course that could not be, for she would be wanted at home; and though it was dull when both Miss Alston and her mamma were gone, yet the child managed to keep as contented and happy as usual; until at last, one August day, she and her father went together to the station to welcome home Mrs. Bridgman again.

So now I have told you all about Christie, and what a help she was to her mamma; and what I have to say now is that if I were one of the little children who may read this story, I would try to do as she did, because you may depend upon it most mothers have more to trouble them than their children guess of, and are very glad of any help they can give them, and no little girl knows what she can do until she tries.

K. S.

"THE QUIVER" BIBLE CLASS.

138. Only three instances of suicide are recorded in the Bible. Give them.

139. In one instance at least the idolatry of the Edomites was adopted by a Jewish king. Give it.

140. Once only after his death is Elisha mentioned in Scripture. Quote the passage.

141. In connection with what two events do we find the town of Endor mentioned in the Bible?

142. We know from Acts xv. 35—39 that Paul and Barnabas disagreed. Show from a passage in St. Paul's writings that this disagreement was not lasting.

143. What were the charges upon which our Lord was condemned to death?

144. Mention the first event and the last event recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

145. A limit was set by our Lord as to the time during which his apostles were to remain in Jerusalem after his ascension.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON PAGE 335.

128. A sword (Gen. iii. 24).

129. Amaziah reported it that, "Jeroboam should die by the sword" (Amos vii. 11).

130. (1) Shortly after the death of Joshua (Judges ii. 13); (2) soon after the marriage of Ahab (1 Kings xvi. 31, 32); (3) by Manasseh (2 Kings xxi. 3).

131. Ezek. xxxiii. 25.

BIBLE NOTES.

THE TWO DEBTORS (Luke vii. 41-43.)



OUR Lord had accepted an invitation to the house of a Pharisee named Simon, and had sat down to meat. A woman of the city, "which was"—rather "who had been once"—a great sinner, found out where he was, and, uninvited, was present in the guest chamber. He was reclining on a couch at the table (sitting as we do now was a habit altogether unknown to the ancients). His feet being bare, the woman came behind him—perhaps, from a feeling of sorrow and shame, she could not bear to confront him—and began to bathe them with her tears and to wipe them with the hairs of her head, to kiss them and anoint them with ointment.

This touch of a sinner was an abomination to the host; it brought out the true spirit of that self-righteous and heartless sect to which he belonged. He was displeased that Jesus did not repel her homage. He, impenitent himself, cannot understand how penitents act and feel, and therefore he makes no allowance for the outpouring of her soul in tears and kisses. He reasons within himself. If "this man" whom I am entertaining as some great personage were indeed a prophet, he would know by the power of discerning spirits (which was held by the Jews to be a sign of a true prophet) that she is unclean, and knowing this, he would not suffer himself to be polluted by her touch.

Christ refutes Simon's supposition, and proves himself more than a prophet, and that he did know who and what manner of person the woman was, by reading his heart, replying to his thoughts, and forgiving the woman's sins. Simon is now about to have a proof given him that his heart is read, and that the believing spirit of her whom he stigmatises as a sinner, is known indeed to his guest.

"Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee." Jesus heard the Pharisee thinking, and answers his unuttered thoughts which he was harbouring within his heart. The Saviour asks permission in these words to speak, and having obtained it—"Master, say on"—he veils the rebuke he is about to utter under the well-known form of a parable. How tenderly does he reveal the truth to this heart blinded by ignorance or prejudice, or perhaps by both!

"There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?" God is the creditor, men the debtors, and sins the debts. Sinners differ in the magnitude of their offences—some are more heavily in debt to Heaven than others. God knows precisely what each

owes. He only can forgive us, for of ourselves we can do nothing to pay the debt which we each day place to our accounts. He forgives us freely, and not for our own works or deservings.

"Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged." The fault-finder is unconscious that by his answer he condemns himself. He is the example of one who loves little; who invites Christ into his house through curiosity; who, in his self-righteousness felt that he had little or no need of a Saviour. Christ accepts the invitation that he may have an opportunity of imparting peace to one thirsting soul. She is attracted to Him who can forgive her sins; she approaches as a sinner, soon to be a saint; as a mourner, soon to be made happy; as a despised one, soon to be highly exalted. The object of her love was great, and great was the reward she obtained. Christ makes use of the parable and answer. He puts the case to him if haply conviction may flash across his mind. "I came into thy house specially invited, and therefore might justly expect marks of hospitality from thee; and what thou my host didst not do for me, she a stranger, whom thou condemnest as a sinner, has more than supplied." He had not given him water for his feet, which he should have done, according to the custom of the country; she washed them with her tears. He had not saluted him with the kiss of peace on the cheek; she kissed his feet again and again. He poured no oil on his guest's head, as was ever the custom at festivals; she anointed his feet with costly ointment.

"Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven." Christ, who read her heart before she entered the house, states the cause (verse 50) of her justification—"Thy faith hath saved thee." Her sins are many, but she is forgiven, because she knows them, and loved much before her pardon is pronounced. Simon dwelt in his mind on her sins; the Lord draws his attention to her sense of them. She owed much, but she honestly confesses that she is a heavy debtor to God; and she comes in faith to Christ in order to be relieved of the burden of this heavy debt. Simon is not conscious that he is a great debtor, and therefore shows little love, and at this time had little forgiveness. Her love is for mercy promised, and shows itself in acts of love to Christ.

Those who have sinned most owe most to the cleansing blood of Christ. It is when sins committed are sincerely confessed that there is hope that love may spring up in the heart which gives birth to repentance to be followed by forgiveness. Such love draws the sinner to Christ, and prompts him to acts of self-abasement and affection.